

Human Events *A Weekly Analysis for the American Citizen*

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CHRISTMAS CONTINUES

by Felix Morley

Again, for a few brief days, our baffled minds have turned to seek values more satisfactory than those of material acquisition; more permanent than those stamped on pieces of green paper by government printers.

It is consoling that the spirit of Christmas should endure so bravely, in spite of systematic governmental effort to efface the teachings of Christ. Mere habit is doubtless in part responsible. Many of our inherited superstitions -- the customs which literally "stand over" us -- have long outlived the conditions which produced them. We might well continue to celebrate the Nativity long after Christ would have ceased to have any meaning for us.

Such automatism could be assisted by the commercial aspects of the festivity. The pathos of man roots in his infinite gullibility. His feelings come quicker and are far more propulsive than his thoughts. The highest, as well as the lowest, emotions are exploitable and Christmas lends itself to exploitation. During the next few days the business news will carry many well-satisfied columns on the volume of Christmas sales. The quantity will be analyzed by Chambers of Commerce and statisticians of high and low degree.

But here and there, for the most part in chambers less public than those of Commerce, Americans are concerning themselves with the qualitative rather than the quantitative side of Christmas. They recall that it was not the gifts of the Magi which made the first Christmas. Something occasioned those gifts. It was the birth of an innocent child whose mother laid him in a manger "because there was no room for them in the inn".

The reason for the absence of hotel accommodations is worthy of recollection. Caesar Augustus was a very modern potentate. That is demonstrated by his decree "that all the world should be taxed". It was that decree which took Joseph and Mary from Galilee to Bethlehem, at the moment when "the days were accomplished that she should be delivered".

It is encouraging to realize, from the story as told by Luke, that there has been progress. Those who are "great with child" no longer have to go personally to the Collector of Internal Revenue. If the device of withholding does not do the trick we can at least stay at home and mail our checks.

II

Each of the four Gospels culminates in the story of the Crucifixion. All that we know about the Nativity is derived from the brief reports by Matthew and Luke. Both those accounts emphasize the tremendous and arbitrary power of the State over the lives of men.

The journey to Bethlehem was undertaken because of the imperial decree of Caesar Augustus. And Matthew tells us that the immediately subsequent flight to Egypt was occasioned by the malevolence of local authority. It was the purpose of King Herod to slay the infant Jesus. When balked in this sinister intent he became "exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under . . ."

So much for Herod. His behavior also serves to remind us that we have not yet slipped back to the complete ruthlessness that once ruled. Even the Nazi gas chambers and our own atomic bombs were not applied to catch an individual through mass obliteration. It was only incidentally that we slew most of the babies under two years of age at Hiroshima, Nagasaki and all the coasts thereof. Most of us could do nothing to avert this slaughter of the innocents. But some may have breathed a prayer for their souls, this Christmas season.

If a prayer is too much to expect, since after all they were only Japanese babies and therefore presumably heathen, some consideration of the political aspects of Christmas is nonetheless appropriate. For if this Holy Day has significance deeper than that of a gala winter carnival, it surely lies in the suggestion that we owe allegiance to an Authority higher than that of any man-made law.

Cyrenius, who was the Governor of Syria when Christ was born, is gone. And Herod is gone. And even the great Caesar Augustus is gone, together with all the far-flung Empire which he ruled and taxed. But the child who was cradled in a manger, in a poor village of a peripheral province of the Roman Empire -- that child still lives!

Because of the State, the circumstances of his birth were abject. Because of the State his parents were forced to fly with him in infancy. Because of the State he was eventually crucified, under conditions calculated to be as humiliating as those of the Nativity. But what has

happened is that the Manger and the Cross have become sanctified. In his lifelong struggle with political authority, Christ won. "The captains and the kings depart." Christmas continues.

III

In The Golden Bough, Sir James Frazer tells of many primitive peoples, including even the early Egyptians, who believed that their gods grew old and died. Being mortal themselves, and having created deities in their own image, it was natural for thoughtless men to circumscribe the lives of their creatures.

"Thus the Greenlanders believed that a wind could kill their most powerful god, and that he would certainly die if he touched a dog. When they heard of the Christian God, they kept asking if he never died, and being informed that he did not, they were much surprised, and said that he must be a very great god indeed."

That was an eminently wise conclusion on the part of these Esquimaux. The goodness -- which is merely Godness slightly corrupted -- of Christ is very important. But more important still is his divinity. The Virgin Birth, which we celebrate on Christmas, is not just a matter for theological disquisition. It is a sign of our times -- a most disturbing sign -- that the political implications of the Immaculate Conception are so customarily overlooked.

If Jesus were merely an unusually moral human being, his exhortations could be observed, or disregarded, in conformity with the promptings of the individual intelligence. But once the divinity of Christ is accepted -- and until relatively modern times it was never questioned by Christians -- a moral Authority superior to all earthly political rule is established. Conscience, which is that part of us which "knows with" God, is confirmed as the guide of individual conduct. The coming of Christ, in human form, therefore divided human allegiance between the sovereignty of God and that of Caesar. The latter became the lesser authority -- spelled in lower case -- for all God-fearing men.

It might be said that we are at odds with Russia because they cannot celebrate Christmas there. The whole theory of the authoritarian State, as carried to perfection under Communism, is that the individual has no recourse from the edicts of his rulers. It is not only the ruble; it is God Himself that the Communists devalue. The reasoning is almost unbelievably arrogant, yet it is undeniably logical.

"God", the Communists argue, "is an idea which has attained reality in the minds of men. Conscience is the link with God. So if the idea of God can be obliterated, conscience will also atrophy. Like the appendix, it can be excised. Eliminate God and there will be no Higher Court to which to carry an appeal in behalf of Liberty.

IV

The Marxist effort to destroy the idea of God is almost certainly doomed to failure. About the only way to save it would be a war with Russia, so brutalizing -- on top of what has already happened -- that we would destroy the spirit of Christ in our own hearts. In that form of suicide we have already been more than half successful, which is why we are so afraid of Communism today.

But still, within most of us, is more than a trace of our Christian heritage. There is a lot of empty lip service in the name of Christ, and in dirty patches throughout America there is no longer even nominal allegiance. Often, now, the name of Christ is only invoked as a curse. Identify those who spurn Christ and you will simultaneously locate the breeding ground of dictatorship. For when divine Authority is degraded, political authority must be elevated. To the extent that men cannot be self-governing -- literally self-governing -- they must be governed by arbitrary rule.

For nearly twenty centuries now the effort of political philosophy in the Christian world has been to reconcile the dilemma posed by the latent antagonism between divine Authority and mundane authorities. Christmas focuses the conflict.

Some, whom we class as mystics, endeavor to ignore the political regulation of their routine activities, concentrating major effort on the development of an inner life. Others -- the agnostics -- endeavor to be indifferent to the existence of divine Authority, and therefore have no spiritual urge to combat an earthly tyranny.

But a third type, fortunately still numerous in America, accepts the political challenge of Christianity with energy and enthusiasm. The endeavor of these valiant citizens, constant or sporadic, is to reconcile in their own lives the diverging mandates of divine and human law. The quality and consistency of this striving determines both the form and practice of the governments under which men live.

"This is the winter of our discontent." But in foul winters, as in fair, Christmas continues. As we prepare to add another number to the years of our Lord, comes Christmas to revive His challenge to our better selves. It is a Holy Day as well as a holiday. It is not wholly commercialized. It is not just an occasion for self-indulgence. It is a period when, however briefly, we remember that the basis of all civilization is the behavior of the individual.

And, like a star above the quagmire of our faults and failings -- Christmas continues.

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By Frank C. Hanighen

December 23, 1947

During the past week Eisenhower moved out of the political spotlight and the kleig lights shone on an oddly different figure -- Mr. Henry Wallace. The apparition materialized -- after some preliminary "Wallese" from the former Vice-President himself -- when the pro-Communist PCA (Progressive Citizens of America) declared that it would urge Mr. Wallace to run for President on a third-party ticket. The ensuing uproar was, of course, fed by no expectation that Wallace could win the '48 election. It was inspired by the distinct possibility that Wallace, if he chose to run, could split off enough votes from the Democrats to result in defeat for Truman.

GOP circles found so much comfort in the development, that they proceeded to discuss the effects of the Wallace boom on the comparative chances of various Republican hopefuls for nomination. One piece of news served to spice such talk. It became known that Congressman Marcantonio, Left Wing leader in the American Labor Party, sent word to Senator Taft that there positively would be a third-party ticket in New York State. The obvious inference drawn was that Senator Taft or some other party "regular" would thereby stand a better chance of getting the nomination; and that Governor Dewey would prove less necessary to insure GOP capture of New York's electoral votes.

Some cautious observers wondered if the PCA, after taking over the American Labor Party, could really corral enough votes in New York to hold the balance of power. For the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union (formerly the backbone of the ALP) announced it would not go along with the PCA. On the other hand, such Communist stalwarts as the furriers union, the wholesale warehouse workers union, the communications union and Quill's transport union would seem to provide quite a formidable base for a Wallace third party. Yet, all these promises remain in question because no one can say confidently that union leadership is able to swing its members at the polls.

It may well be that Wallace will inherit only a core of the Left Wing vote in New York. But while finding consolation in this idea, the Democratic chieftains remained visibly worried. Perhaps they are concerned over the various deals which the O'Dwyer administration has negotiated with the Communists. The recent relief scandals in New York showed how strongly the Communists are entrenched in that agency. And there are other odd alliances between Communists and non-Communist forces, such as the slot-machine bosses.

The probability is that the Democratic leaders are worried because they know too well how local political machines often place their own local interests above those of the national ticket. There is no certainty that Wallace can achieve his objective of defeating Truman. But in the uncertainty lies infinite anxiety for the Administration. The situation undoubtedly constitutes one of the great puzzles of the developing campaign.

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While the role of exported foodstuffs in the current inflation is now generally recognized, such is not the case with exported coal. Little has been said about the fact that in the first nine months of 1947, approximately 31 million gross tons of coal were shipped to Britain and Europe as compared with 15 million tons in the same period of 1946. To take care of this huge export trade as well as the swollen domestic demands, coal production has maintained a high level and will probably surpass the record of 1946. It is estimated that weekly production would be at

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least one million tons higher were it not for the car shortage, which was not created by the exports, but which has been intensified by them. It requires from two to three times as many days to return a coal car hauling export coal to the port as it does a coal car billed for some interior destination.

The United Mine Workers Journal discusses this situation: "The payments for this (exported) coal come from money loaned European countries or credits granted by the United States. Foreign buyers have been choosy. Spending nobody's money, they have bid against each other for our choice coals and have run the prices up to a point that operators, wholesalers and retailers have increased the prices on all grades of coal for domestic consumption. The result is that the bidding up of the price on 31 million tons of export coal will cost the American domestic consumers and industrialists from \$250 million to \$500 million in 1947 on all coal consumed on the American front. It's the same old story of Government buying of wheat and other commodities for European aid. Government misuse of the people's money and government methods of purchase inflate the prices on the domestic front."

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Now that the London Conference has failed, what will Russia do next? Those in Washington whose business it is to forecast Russian moves on the chessboard of world politics suspect that the next objective will be Berlin. The Soviets, they think, will try to force the United States, Britain and France to evacuate the little non-Communist island which still exists within the Iron Curtain. An AP dispatch from Berlin on December 17 may be a preliminary "feeler": "The Russian-sponsored newspaper Berlin-Am-Mittag demanded today that Britain, France and the United States vacate Berlin."

It is not believed, however, that the Russians will resort to military action to get us out of the former German capital. The Russians, indeed, would not have to employ such measures. The Western Powers' position in Berlin is, to say the least, precarious. They are restricted to the use of one Auto-Bahn, one railroad and one air route for communications with the West. All the Russians would have to do would be to mislay freight cars, sabotage our truck caravans, arrest Allied personnel on all sorts of pretended misdemeanors, etc. Such tactics would make our position in the "island" highly uncomfortable, if not completely untenable.

The Russian purpose in forcing us to evacuate Berlin would be twofold. The "island", with really representative parties in existence, is an embarrassing obstacle in the way of Soviet plans for a complete cordon sanitaire of puppet governments in Eastern Europe. To remove this impediment is obviously one important objective of Russian strategy; another is to cause the Western Allies to lose face. For, if we should have to surrender Berlin, our prestige would suffer throughout all Europe.

* * * * *

As if from the pages of Hans Christian Anderson, a fairy tale romance unfolded against the forbidding and highly unromantic backdrop which is the Continent of Europe today. Young King Mihai of Rumania plighted his troth, at least unofficially, with blonde Princess Anne of Denmark, in the aftermath of the wedding of Princess Elizabeth of England. It was then asked: Would Mihai return to his captive kingdom and would the ogres in the dark forest of Bucharest give their blessing to the union? At any rate, he did return to his capital this week.

Those who follow present-day Balkan politics believe that the King is in for trouble. They say that he received bad advice from the British, his hosts at the royal wedding party. Fearing Russian displeasure, the British counselled him to return to Rumania. He should have chosen exile, say these observers. He should have taken his stand on some other matter than matrimony; then, later, he could have challenged the Communists' right to pass on his choice of a wife. But, in his present course, he has confused the situation, given hostages to the enemy.

The Communists, it is believed, are playing cat and mouse with him. He will seek Governmental approval for his marriage. They will counter with impossible demands, which will outrage his patriotism; and the alternative offered him will be abdication. Anna Pauker is the ogress with whom the poor little King must deal. And if he chooses abdication? Then, the Communists will seek to discredit him in the eyes of his people, paint him as a monarch who deserted them; as a true son of his father, another Carol subordinating his duty to his realm to his love for a woman. King Mihai faces an ordeal never pictured in the pages of the story books. And only a fairy tale miracle, it is believed, can rescue him.

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Henry Beston up in Maine writes us in a letter: "It is so important that our people should be told that their major effort was one of destruction; it may help some among them along a path to intellectual honesty. How great the destruction is, I imagine that none of us really know, for the dust of the 'massacre by bombing' is still in the air, and we cannot see through it to know what has gone. But have you noticed how anything written before the massacre is literature from another and quite vanished world?

"The destruction of the Teutonic bulwark against Asia and the Slavs has one particularly interesting historical parallel which now and then recurs to my mind. It is the destruction of Armenia by the idiot Byzantines in the Eleventh Century. Up to the time of this destruction, the Armenian kingdom -- politically unstable as it was -- had kept the Asiatics at bay, doing manful service against those wandering invaders. Once Armenia was smashed, over came the Selyuks. This destruction of Armenia and the power to hold the mountain frontier was one of the most lamentable errors in all history.

"I think with the Greeks that what is done 'outside of life' is punished. There is no exact Greek phrase for my English one, but the meaning held in the shell of the words catches an enduring mood of the Greek mind. Things done 'outside of life' (like Orestes' killing of his mother) well . . . we have waged such a war, and it too will be punished. When jellied gasoline and unquenchable gobbets of phosphorus are showered on women and children huddled in the open fields, the stars cannot but work against us in their courses."

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From down in Norris, Tennessee, another friend, Jim Rorty, sends us a Christmas card. On it are his verses, "Memorandum to a Tired Bureaucrat" -- a more hopeful message than Henry Beston's.

"This, Procurator, is the answer to your question:
Twenty centuries of lies, yet still this truth
Falls white at the year's turn on the embers of a world
That will not die, not while the valiant candles gleam
Even from the cellars of the broken, blind
Cities that attest your Caesar's power, where now
The ragged carolers trudge and sing . . .

See now, O Governor, how patiently this truth
Fastens the strings of packages by which
Denver's plenty answers Dresden's dearth,
Caesar is flouted and man set free.

Now that the file is closed, will you not hear
The answer that you would not then abide?
These be mysteries not in your manual, powers
Greater and more durable than your sad imperium."

Book Events

The United States and the Caribbean, by Dexter Perkins. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. \$3.00. Reviewed by J. M. Lalley.

This monograph by a well-known historian of the Monroe Doctrine is another in the series of books on foreign policy which is being prepared under the editorship of Mr. Sumner Welles. In contrast to some other contributors to the series, Professor Perkins has the merit of being able to write from a point of view unclouded by emotional or ideological predilections. The principal defect of his book as a work of reference is the Professor's almost morbid reluctance to commit himself to a definite statement about anything which is not a matter of historical record. This leads him at times into a kind of Delphic solemnity, as when, for example, after raising the question whether the latest government in Guatemala will rule by democratic means or will prove to be just another Central American dictatorship, he answers by saying that it is something "which remains to be determined". Again, the Professor, wishing to convey the not very complicated thought that increasing prosperity in Nicaragua may bring with it an era of political stability, observes that such a consequence "certainly does not appear out of the question". All this makes for the sort of rhetorical flatulence familiar to readers of newspaper editorials.

Nevertheless, Professor Perkins' book has value as a reminder of the enormous importance of the Caribbean area to the security of the United States at a time when the course of international politics has tended to focus our fears on the Pacific and the Arctic. The strategic concern of the United States with the Caribbean was a consequence of the imperialistic excursion of 1898 and was vastly increased by Theodore Roosevelt's fateful Panamanian adventure of 1903. The advent of a Communist government in any of the six Central American republics or in Cuba, Haiti or Santo Domingo would be a danger of the greatest magnitude. This, however, is a matter on which our Professor is in general reassuring. His main point appears to be, that while Latin Americans by and large have evinced a toleration of despotism in the purely political sphere, they have shown an even greater aversion than ourselves to the intrusions of government into the economic sphere or into what they consider private life. In other words, the Professor tells us that totalitarianism in its real meaning is something alien to the traditions and temperament of these peoples. All the same, the gulf which persists in most of these countries between the wealthy and powerful few and the illiterate and poverty-stricken many creates a social climate which, with the coming of industrialism, might be highly favorable to the growth of Communism. Thus far in all but two of these countries Communism remains a negligible political force; but in Costa Rica a party which now calls itself the Vanguardia Popular, and of which the Professor in his cautious idiom says there is "little reason to disbelieve that it has some kind of connection with Moscow", has shown an increasing strength; in Cuba the Partido Social Democratico, whose tie with Moscow is even less in doubt, is one of the four parties by whose sufferance President Grau San Martin remains in power.

But all in all the danger of Communism in the Caribbean, though scarcely non-existent, remains comfortably remote, and the arrogance of M. Molotov at San Francisco served to increase the remoteness.

The statesmen of the Caribbean countries have certainly not abandoned their historical distrust of Yankee imperialism or their fears of intervention. Above all, they are anxious to avoid any appearance of acting in international affairs as the satellites or servitors of our Department of State. Nevertheless, as Professor Perkins argues, the real community of interest between them and ourselves in any matter involving controversy or conflict with the U. S. S. R is so strong as almost to guarantee their support.